Fads Of The 1940s & 1950s

The 1940s and 1950s were decades of profound and lasting cultural change. There was plenty of trauma and upheaval but in this article we concentrate on what was good and fun! Reminisce about the hobbies, mania, fashion, sports, and other frivolities of those years. Some of the fads are still around today!

What To Do

Using the material provided, read and discuss the memories residents have of this era.

Read one fad and discuss. (Remember that reading too much information at once can be overwhelming.)

Print out the images to help refresh memories and aid conversation.

Conversation Starters

Do you remember this fad?
Did you ever do this / have this?

If you have a vivid memory of the time, can you describe where you were? And who you were with?

What age were you in this era?

Rock & Roll

Despite elements of rock and roll first being heard in 1930s music, the genre acquired its name in 1954. Beyond simply a music style, rock and roll influenced lifestyle, fashion and attitudes. Poodle skirts and bobby sox became fashionable, and new and energetic dance styles like the jive emerged.

Sideburns

Sideburns were originally known as 'burnsides', named after Ambrose Burnside - an American General of the nineteenth century - known for his unusual facial hairstyle that connected thick sideburns by way of a moustache. In the 1950s, sideburns gained popularity with young men who rejected the clean-shaven culture. Marlon Brando, Elvis Presley and James Dean helped spur the comeback.

Hula Hoops

What goes around comes around! Hula hoops invaded playgrounds and took the world by storm in the late 1950s. Thanks to a great marketing campaign, 25 million hoops were sold in a few months! These toys are still popular today and are now even used in adult fitness classes!

Ant Farms

Ant farms were popular in the 1950s! The ‘farm’ would be made from a glass or clear plastic container, some dirt or sand, a few dozen ants and some food. People of all ages had fun watching the ants make ‘inroads’ inside the farm.

Bikinis

The modern bikini was first unveiled in 1946 in France. Louis Réard introduced his design four days after the United States had begun atomic testing in the Bikini Atoll. In a rather bold marketing ploy, Réard named his creation ‘le bikini’, implying it was as momentous an invention as the new bomb!

Chewing Gum

Chewing some kind of natural resin dates back thousands of years across many cultures. During World War II, gum featured in every soldier's meal rations. Gum advertisements displayed patriotic imagery and messages to boost morale and sales increased dramatically.
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Conical Bras

Can you believe that American billionaire Howard Hughes designed the first conical bra? He was inspired by film star Jane Russell’s breasts when the film ‘The Outlaw’ was being made. He employed his engineering skills to design the cantilevered underwire bra to emphasise her assets!

Boomerangs

Boomerangs originated in Australia as a weapon used by indigenous Australians for hunting. As a toy, they were popularised in the late 1950s in the United States, and then spread to many parts of the world.

Bermuda Shorts

Bermuda shorts were once the uniform of British soldiers in Bermuda! Tourists loved them, and they became the most popular summer wear of the 50s.

Drive-Ins

Drive-in theatres started in the 1930s but the public embraced them in the late forties and fifties. They appealed to families and young people wishing for extra privacy on date nights!

Ten-Pin Bowling

This ancient game had its golden age in the early fifties when professional bowlers earned salaries to rival that of football and hockey players. With the advent of automatic pin-setting machinery the popularity of the sport exploded. Ten-pin bowling was actually shortlisted for inclusion in the 2020 Olympics, but missed out.

Jukeboxes

Despite dating back to the 1890s, jukeboxes were immensely popular in the forties and fifties. They were an important source of income for record companies. Their decline was due to the portable radio and later the cassette tape deck.